



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



GOVERNOR NOEM PROCLAIMS VIETNAM VETERANS DAY

Governor Kristi Noem, in coordination with the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, is proclaiming Tuesday, March 29, 2022, as “Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day.” The governor and Department are calling on all South Dakotans to recognize the courage, service, and sacrifice of the men and women who served during the Vietnam War.

Some defended as ground troops in a combat capacity in country, some were a mile offshore on a Navy ship providing fire support, and some were air support. Others provided the necessary support roles in Vietnam, at nearby posts, and back in the States that were vital during the foreign engagement. All who served were affected in some way by their experience.

“More than 27,000 South Dakotans served valiantly during the Vietnam War. Of those, 210 South Dakotans made the ultimate sacrifice,” said Governor Noem. “Through the establishment of an annual statewide Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day, South Dakotans can express their appreciation and honor the men and women who served during the Vietnam War by thanking them for their courage, devotion, and sacrifice.”

“Those who fought in Vietnam are part of us and part of our history,” said Greg Whitlock, Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. “They performed with a steadfastness and valor that veterans of other wars salute, and they are forever in the ranks of that special number of Americans in every generation that the nation records as true patriots. Our Vietnam Veterans fought for freedom in a place where liberty was in danger.”

“On this special day, we encourage our fellow Americans to join us in remembering and honoring those who served during the Vietnam War with the gratitude and respect that they deserve,” said Whitlock.

Welcome home!

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VA RELEASES ASSET AND INFRASTRUCTURE REVIEW

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs released its Asset and Infrastructure Review report, March 14, that includes recommendations by the VA Secretary to cement the department as the primary, world-class provider and coordinator of Veterans health care for generations to come.

The VA MISSION Act requires Secretary McDonough to publish the AIR report in the Federal Register and submit it to Congress and a presidentially appointed AIR Commission.

The AIR Commission will conduct public hearings as part of its review of VA's recommendations before submitting its own recommendations to the president for further review in 2023.

The report's release marks the beginning of an in-depth deliberative process. The AIR report is the result of years of re-

search and analysis intended to help VA build a health care network with the right facilities, in the right places, to provide the right care for all veterans, including underserved and at-risk veteran populations in every part of the country — making sure our facilities and services are accessible to veterans in their communities.

The recommendations center around improving access to and quality of care for veterans by ensuring the department's infrastructure in the decades ahead reflects veterans' needs and 21st century design standards. The VA is investing heavily in its number one asset — its employees, strengthening its public/private strategic partnerships, and elevating its role as the leading health care research entity and the leading health care workforce training institution in the country.

"The VA came to these recommendations by asking ourselves one question above all else: what's best for the veterans we serve? Because that is our number one goal, today and every day. That's what our Asset and Infrastructure Review recommendations are all about," said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. "We've spent the last several weeks and months communicating about this with VA employees, union partners, state partners, veteran service organizations, Congress, and more. I'm continuing to consult with our unions, and will do so moving forward, because I so appreciate the strong partnership we have with them."

Visit [AIR Commission report](#) for more information. View the [Federal Register notice](#).

Note: This story was provided by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.



VA Recommendations to the

ASSET AND INFRASTRUCTURE REVIEW COMMISSION

March 2022

PVA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BLAKE NOMINATED TO AIR COMMISSION

Paralyzed Veterans of America National President Charles Brown released the following statement on President Biden's announcement of his intention to nominate PVA Executive Director Carl Blake to serve on the United States Department of Veterans Affairs' Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) Commission – an independent, bipartisan group established by the VA MISSION Act in 2018 to review VA's recommendations for how they can modernize their infrastructure and improve care to veterans.

"The VA healthcare system provides direct medical care to more than seven million veterans every year – many of whom (like myself and our members) heavily depend on that specialized care available from the VA to address our spinal cord injuries and diseases. For that care to be successfully carried out, VA's infrastructure of over 1,750 access points – including its medical centers, outpatient clinics, Vet Centers, SCI/D Centers, long-term care facilities, and community living centers, must be in line with an accurate assessment of available community resources and the true needs of veterans, particularly those with catastrophic disabilities.

Paralyzed Veterans of America applauds the White House for nominating our Executive Director Carl Blake to sit on VA's AIR Commission. This Commission will play a vital role in determining the future of VA-provided care for our nation's veterans, and Carl would be well-suited to serve as a commissioner. A U.S. Army veteran who sus-

tained a spinal cord injury during a parachuting accident and a longtime PVA leader, Carl knows the military, understands the intricacies of VA care, and listens regularly to veterans receiving VA care. A graduate of the United States Military Academy and now father of a West Point cadet, and former PVA associate executive director of government relations, he brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to effectively communicate and collaborate in moving forward a comprehensive plan to rebuild and realign VA's infrastructure to better meet veterans' needs both now and in the future. With dedicated leaders, like Carl, on the AIR Commission, our veterans and the future of VA infrastructure would be in great hands."



**Paralyzed
Veterans
of America**

AIR COMMISSION MEMBERS TO DATE

SDDVA has received word that the following have been nominated to serve on the Asset and Infrastructure Review Commission. It is our understanding that the makeup of the Commission will be nine.

Patrick Murphy, Nominee for Chair of the VA AIR Commission

Patrick Murphy, a Pennsylvania native, was the first Iraq War Veteran to serve in Congress. He received a Bronze Star for his service in Iraq as paratrooper with the 82nd Airborne Division. While in Congress, Murphy led the signing of two landmark bills into law, including the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell and the 21st Century GI Bill. As Under Secretary of the Army during the Obama-Biden Administration, Murphy oversaw the management and operation of the Army – a Fortune 10-sized organization and the nation's second largest employer of over 1.3 million individuals. Murphy led the expansion of the Soldier for Life initiative, which saved \$340M in FY16, and helped the Army reach recruitment goals for the first time in five years with over 130,000 millennials hired. In 2019, Murphy chaired the Cyberspace Solarium Commission which generated more than 100 recommendations for improving the United States' approach to digital security issues, many of which became law through multiple defense bills and a high-profile infrastructure package. For the last several years, Murphy has been working across the public and private sector to invest in veteran-owned businesses, advocate for stronger healthcare policy, and recruiting young people and veterans to run for public office.

Jonathan Woodson, Nominee for Vice Chair of the VA AIR Commission

Dr. Jonathan Woodson is the Lars Anderson Professor in Management and Professor of the Practice at the Boston University Questrom School of Business, and holds joint appointments as Professor of Surgery at the School of Medicine, and Professor of Health Law, Policy, and Management at the School of Public Health. He established and led the University-wide Institute for Health System Innovation and Policy. From 2010-2016, Woodson was the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs and Director of the Tricare Management Activity in the United States Department of Defense (DOD). He was the principal advisor to the Secretary of Defense for all health protection related issues, and ensured the effective execution of the DOD medical mission. He exercised authority, direction, and control over the Defense Health Agency, Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, Armed Forces Radiobiology Research Institute, Defense Center of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury, and the Tricare Health Plan serving 9.5 million beneficiaries. Woodson holds the rank of Major General, United States Army, Reserve, and is Commander of the United States Army Reserve Medical Command, Pinellas Park, Florida.

William Carl Blake, Nominee for Member of the VA AIR Commission

Carl Blake is the Executive Director for Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), a position he has served in since January 2018. He is responsible for exercising administrative control, as directed by the President of PVA, of all offices and functions of the organization, including overseeing all efforts devoted to financial management, development and fundraising, strategic communications, and service programs executed by PVA. Blake previously served as the Associate Executive Director of Government Relations for PVA. He has represented PVA to federal agencies and has frequently testified before committees of the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate.

(Continued on next page.)

AIR COMMISSION (CONTINUED)

Blake was raised in Woodford, Virginia. He attended the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York. He received a Bachelor of Science Degree from the Military Academy in May 1998. He was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment (1st Brigade) of the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. He graduated from Infantry Officer Basic Course, U.S. Army Ranger School, U.S. Army Airborne School, and Air Assault School. His awards include the Army Commendation Medal, Expert Infantryman's Badge, and German Parachutist Badge. Blake retired from the military in October 2000 due to injuries suffered during a parachute training exercise. He completed spinal cord injury rehabilitation at the Richmond VA Medical Center in Virginia. Blake received his Master's in Public Administration from Old Dominion University with a concentration in Nonprofit Management. Blake lives in Fredericksburg, VA, with his wife Venus, son Jonathan, and daughter Brooke.

Michael Blecker, Nominee for Member of the VA AIR Commission

Michael Blecker served in the U.S. Army from 1967 to 1970, with combat infantry service in Vietnam from 1968 - 1969. Upon finishing law school, he joined Swords to Plowshares in 1976 to help veterans navigate the complex VA disability system. In 1982, he became Executive Director of Swords to Plowshares, and has over the past 45 years guided the agency from its small grassroots origins to one with a continuum of specialized services and an annual budget of over \$35 million. Blecker has a nationwide reputation for dedicated service and as an authority on veterans' services and veterans' rights. He is co-founder of the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans and the California Association of Veterans' Service Agencies. He has served on the Congressional Commission on Service Members and Veterans Transition Assistance, the California Senate Commission on Homeless Veterans, the San Francisco Mayor's Homeless Planning Committee, the National Agent Orange Settlement Advisory Board, the Agent Orange Information Center, and the Veterans Speakers Alliance. From 2015 to 2016, Blecker served on the federal Commission on Care, examining veteran access to VA care.

Christine Hill, Nominee for Member of the VA AIR Commission

Christine Hill currently serves as the Republican Staff Director for the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health. Prior to this position, she was the Executive Vice President, Government Affairs for Wounded Warrior Project (WWP). In the Bush Administration, Hill was Senate-confirmed as the Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs for the Department of Veterans Affairs. Prior to her appointment, Hill was Director, Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs for the 2005 Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission. Before joining this congressionally mandated commission, Hill was the military legislative assistant to Senator Elizabeth Dole. A 1983 graduate of the United States Air Force Academy, Hill held numerous positions as a KC-135 instructor navigator and senior standardization/evaluation navigator. During this time, she flew combat support during the U.S. intervention in Panama, and was deployed to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, flying in support of Desert Storm as the chief of tanker air operations. Following an assignment to Headquarters Air Combat Command, Hill was hand-picked to become the first woman assigned to fly the B-1B Bomber. She completed qualification as both an offensive and defensive systems officer and was the first initial qualification student combat qualified as a weapons system officer and instructor. During this time, she also held various Squadron-and Wing-level leadership positions. Hill concluded her military career at the Pentagon with assignments in Air Force plans and budget, and in the weapon systems division of the Air Force Office of Legislative Liaison. She retired as a Lieutenant Colonel.

(Continued on next page.)

AIR COMMISSION (CONTINUED)

Joyce Johnson, Nominee for Member of the VA AIR Commission Rear Admiral Dr. Joyce M. Johnson, DO, MA is a physician with senior public health leadership experience in the civilian and military sectors. Her last active duty assignment was with the U.S. Coast Guard as Director, Health and Safety and she retired at the rank of Rear Admiral, Upper Half (08). As a physician, she is board certified in Public Health/Preventive Medicine and Psychiatry, and is also a board-certified Clinical Pharmacologist and Certified Addiction Specialist. She is a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine, earning a D.O. degree; prior to that she earned a master's degree in Hospital and Health Administration. Based on her previous experiences, Johnson understands the clinical needs of veterans from both provider and patient perspectives, and recognizes the many contributions the VA health care system makes to patients, their families, and the overall community in meeting the needs of America's veterans. For many years, she was a surveyor for a national accreditation body, surveying both in-patient and ambulatory care facilities. At the VA, Johnson served as a Senior Research Resident, and more recently has been appointed to the VA Commission on Care, the Advisory Committee on Disability Compensation, and the Advisory Committee on Women Veterans. In addition, Johnson served on the Board and chaired several committees of the Military Officers Association of America. Johnson has been awarded eight honorary doctoral degrees, and has extensive on-site disaster relief experience, and has provided clinical care and/or medical consultation on all seven continents.

Lucretia McClenney, Nominee for Member of the VA AIR Commission

Lucretia M. McClenney has dedicated her professional life to our nation's men and women who have served and are serving in uniformed armed services, and their families. She served with distinction for 30 years in the Army in various medical treatment facilities and staffs worldwide, and retired as a Colonel in November 2001. Immediately following McClenney's retirement from the Army, she joined the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) as Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary for Policy, Planning, and Preparedness. She also served as Director of the VA's Center for Minority Veterans, where she was the principal advisor to the Secretary of the VA on policies and programs affecting minority veterans. As an outcome of her efforts in this role, the VA established an Office of Health Equity to ensure health equity for all veterans. Her dedication and passion for the health care of veterans led to her selection in 2015 to serve on the congressionally mandated Commission on Care that provided recommendations for transforming veterans' health care. She served as a consultant with the DOD Vietnam War Commemoration. Currently, McClenney is a member of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) Board of Directors, and VA's Former POW Advisory Committee. She received a BSN from Murray State University, and an MSN in Psychiatric/Mental Health Nursing.

José Ramos, Nominee for Member of the VA AIR Commission

José R. Ramos is the Vice President of Government and Community Relations for the Wounded Warrior Project. Ramos grew up in El Paso, TX and joined the Navy as a Hospital Corpsman, spending his entire career serving alongside Marines as a platoon "Doc". He served one tour in Afghanistan and two tours in Iraq. In 2004, while serving as a member of a Sniper Team, he was hit by a rocket and was severely injured. His injuries were nearly fatal and included a left arm amputation, lung contusions, nerve damage to the left leg, bulged discs in the lumbar region, and numerous shrapnel wounds which led to his retirement from service in November 2005. Ramos used adaptive sports through his recovery, running the New York City Marathon. In 2007, Ramos was appointed by President Bush to serve on the President's Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors, tasked to conduct a review of the care America is providing wounded servicemen and women returning from the battlefield. Ramos holds a B.A. in Government and International Politics and a Minor in Islamic Studies.

WOEPPEL ADDRESSES ROTARY CLUB MEMBERS

SDDVA's Lisa Woeppel briefed the Custer Rotary Club this week at the Crazy Horse Memorial. Woeppel serves as the admissions and health information coordinator for the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home.

Woeppel provided a history of the Home, information on the current facility and services, and an overview of the admissions process. She also highlighted the role of the county and tribal veterans service officers and the great partners they are in our veteran network. She also noted how important it is to work with family members on their long-term wishes.

Woeppel invited the Rotary members to tour the Home and see first-hand what a great facility it is.

Questions arose on the South Dakota Veterans Cemetery vs the Black Hills National Cemetery, service-connection ratings, and proposed VA facility closures.



"It was a pleasure to attend the Custer Rotary Club meeting and hear the activities they are involved with as well as share information about the Department and our programs and services," said Woeppel. "Spending time with these great leaders who are willing to give their all to veterans is an amazing gift."

BULLERMAN AND POLLARD HEAD BACK TO SCHOOL

SDDVA's Deputy Secretary Aaron Pollard and Program Manager Heather Bullerman donned their books and backpack and headed back to school this week!

Pollard and Bullerman were speakers at the American Experience class at Jefferson High School in Sioux Falls. The class project focuses on our America at War. Pollard and Bullerman were asked to share their experiences of serving in the military, being a veteran, and assisting veterans with benefits and services.

This is the fifth year SDDVA has participated in this program.

SDDVA TAKES ISSUE WITH AIR COMMISSION REPORT

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, along with Governor Kristi Noem and our South Dakota Congressional Delegation, have many concerns with the recently released VA Recommendations Report to the AIR Commission.

We do plan to be a part of all hearings/townhalls that will be held in South Dakota.

We will be leading a boots-on-the-ground grassroots effort to make sure the Commission hears the concerns of our veterans and their families.

We encourage all of our network partners to review the report to the Commission ([VA Recommendations to the AIR Commission Home](#)).

This link ([Appendices - VA Recommendations to the AIR Commission](#)) will take you to the acronyms, questionnaire, Federal Register notice, methodology, cost benefit analysis, and by VISN summary results.



CHUCK-A-PUCK
MIDWEST HONOR FLIGHT
SATURDAY, MARCH 26TH

HELP MIDWEST HONOR FLIGHT RAISE MONEY
TOWARDS TRANSPORTING AMERICA'S VETERANS TO
WASHINGTON, D.C. TO VISIT THOSE MEMORIALS
DEDICATED TO HONOR THE SERVICE AND SACRIFICES
OF THEMSELVES AND TO FELLOW VETERANS
\$20 TICKETS BOWL SECTION (F -N)

SCAN CODE FOR TICKETS
OR
ENTER THIS LINK INTO ANY WEB BROWSER:
FEVO.ME/3AHGaFT

605-716-7825 | RAPIDCITYRUSH.COM

The poster features a large 'R' logo with a lightning bolt, a circular logo for 'Midwest Honor Flight' showing a silhouette of a plane flying over a red barn, and a detailed seating chart for the 'Bowl Section' of a hockey rink. The seating chart shows rows A through S and 1 through 16. A QR code is located in the bottom left corner.

MIDWEST HONOR FLIGHT DAY OF GIVING



On Tuesday, March 29, 2022, participating Culver's restaurants in Iowa and South Dakota will donate 10% of sales to Midwest Honor Flight.

The mission: to fly WWII, Korean War and Vietnam Veterans to see their memorials in Washington, DC.

Enjoy a delicious meal, benefit a great cause and feel good all over!
A representative of the Midwest Honor Flight will be present at each location from 5-8pm.

Thank you for your support.

IOWA

Culver's of Sioux Center

Culver's of Sioux City-Hamilton Blvd.

SOUTH DAKOTA

Culver's of Mitchell

Culver's of Yankton

Culver's of Aberdeen



culvers.com



Month of the Military Child

PURPLE UP! FOR MILITARY KIDS DAY

Friday, April 8th

APRIL IS A TIME TO
RECOGNIZE AND HONOR
OUR MILITARY YOUTH FOR
THEIR RESILIENCE,
STRENGTH, AND SERVICE.
THERE ARE OVER 6,400
MILITARY YOUTH IN SOUTH
DAKOTA. CELEBRATE AND
THANK THEM FOR ALL THAT
THEY DO! SHOW YOUR
SUPPORT AND WEAR PURPLE
ON PURPLE UP DAY!

SDNG Child & Youth Program



Ground Breaking Ceremony Gold Star Families Memorial Monument

April 6th 2022 @3:30pm

Veterans Memorial Park

Sioux Falls, SD

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Mar 26—Stand Up for Women Veterans Retreat—Our Savior Lutheran Church (909 W. 33rd Street)—Sioux Falls—8:30 am—1:30 pm (CT)
- Mar 26—Rapid City Rush Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser “Chuck a Puck”
- Mar 29—Culver’s Regional Day of Giving for Midwest Honor Flight
- Apr 4—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—(20901 Pleasant Valley Dr)—Sturgis—9:00 am (MT)
- Apr 6—Groundbreaking Ceremony for Gold Star Families Memorial Monument—(Veterans Memorial Park)—Sioux Falls—3:30 pm (CT)
- Apr 8—Purple Up for Military Children**
- Apr 8-10—DAV of South Dakota State Convention—Rushmore Hotel and Suites (445 Mt. Rushmore Road)—Rapid City
- Apr 20—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Military Heritage Alliance Building—Spirit of America Room—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—9:00 am (CT)
- May 10—SDDVA Mini Conference—Pennington County Conference Room in the Care Building in Rapid City (321 Kansas City Street)—10:00 am—2:00 pm (MT)
- May 11—SDDVA Mini Conference—American Legion Post 8 Cabin in Pierre (520 S. Pierre Street)—10:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)
- May 12—SDDVA Mini Conference—Brookings City Library—Cooper Room (513 3rd Street)—10:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)
- May 14—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 9
- May 14—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 9 Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center Arena—Doors open at 7:30 pm and program at 9:00 pm (CT)
- May 14-15—Ellsworth AFB Air Show
- May 30—Memorial Day Program—SD Veterans Cemetery (25965 477th Avenue)—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)
- May 30—Memorial Day Program—Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home —(2500 Minnekahta Avenue)—Hot Springs—10:00 am (MT)
- Jun 1—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 10
- Jun 1—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 10 Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center Arena—Doors open at 7:30 pm and program at 9:00 pm (CT)
- Jun 9-12—State VFW Convention—4-H Fairgrounds (3200 W Havens Avenue)—Mitchell
- Jun 12—Midwest Honor Flight Annual Honor Ride—SD Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls
- Jun 16-19—State American Legion Conference—Watertown
- Jun 18—Midwest Honor Flight 3rd Reunion—Sioux Falls Convention Center—11:00 am (CT)
- Jun 25—Lake County Abate Poker Run for Midwest Honor Flight
- Jul 11—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—(20901 Pleasant Valley Dr)—Sturgis—9:00 am (MT)
- Jul 18-23—National Veterans Golden Age Games—Sioux Falls



UPCOMING EVENTS

Aug 6-9—DAV National Convention—Orlando, FL
Aug 14-19—Military Order of the Purple Heart National Convention—Rapid City
Aug 15-17—SDDVA Annual CTVSO Benefit School
Aug 18-23—USS Iowa Veterans Association Reunion—Ramkota Hotel and Conference Center—Rapid City
Aug 22—The Barrel House Day of Giving fundraiser for Midwest Honor Flight—Sioux Falls
Sep 1—Veterans Day at the South Dakota State Fair
Sep 1-5—South Dakota State Fair
Sep 10—Heroes Helping with Horsepower Military Appreciation Event—W. Main Street—Ethan—Festivities begin at 8:00 am (CT)
Oct 3—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—(20901 Pleasant Valley Dr)—Sturgis—9:00 am (MT)
Oct 15—Midwest Honor Flight Fifth Annual Hangar Dance—SD Military Heritage Alliance (1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—7:00 pm (CT)
Dec 17—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)

UPCOMING EVENTS

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